



Tips,  
Tools and  
Resources for  
Organizers

# Organize a Food Drive

**Organizing a food drive is a great way to help** people in your community. You can select the local senior center, food pantry, or shelter that you want to support. Participants make a difference in their community through a fun and social event.

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## Overview

### The Problem

Many community-based organizations lack the capacity or resources to meet the needs of the growing population of hungry Americans. Food pantries and other charitable organizations also often run short on food that is age appropriate (e.g., low sodium for seniors), culturally appropriate and/or fresh. Tight economic times have only further burdened these organizations.

### The Solution

Organize a food drive! Collect food and/or monetary donations for your favorite community-based food organization. There are a few models for how to hold a food drive. This toolkit focuses on the “single-site drop-off” model, where people bring food donations to a place, on a specific date, where volunteers are waiting to receive it.

### Time Commitment

For a single-site food drop-off event, an organizer will spend 2 to 4 hours each week for several weeks. For a food drive involving numerous drop-off locations and spanning several days or weeks, additional time is needed to cover the length of the drive.

Other volunteer roles: Anywhere from 2 to 10 hours throughout the process.

### Special Considerations

None.

### Who Can Do This?

Everyone! It is helpful to have a detailed-oriented person lead the activity.

### Great Reasons To Do This Project

- Help feed people
- Support a community program
- Demonstrate social responsibility
- Meet people in your community
- Give back to the community during these uncertain economic times.



“There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” - *Mahatma Gandhi*



## The Basic Steps

### Step 1: PICK A LOCAL GROUP THAT NEEDS FOOD

Consider both the obvious (food bank and homeless shelter) and the less obvious (faith-based organizations, senior citizen centers, schools).

If you want suggestions on food organizations in need, start by contacting your local food bank. You'll find them listed online at [www.FeedingAmerica.org](http://www.FeedingAmerica.org).

 Food banks and pantries are all different, so before you start planning, reach out to determine the best way to meet their needs.

Food banks are warehouses that collect large quantities of food to distribute to local food pantries, soup kitchens, etc. The food bank itself may be interested in benefiting from your drive. Or, they may suggest a local food organization in your neighborhood.

Once you've determined which organization will benefit from your drive, use the questions on the enclosed Tip Sheet as a guide to help adapt the Food Drive to their needs.

Local food organizations often are in short supply of age-appropriate food (e.g., low sodium, low sugar, or easy to open foods) and/or culturally-appropriate foods. Find sample lists of these foods in this how-to guide and consider narrowing your requests for donations to these special foods.

If no local organization needs support, (If no local organization needs support, consider) making a donation to help those who are hungry. Each day millions face the impossible choice between buying food or the medicines they need. AARP Foundation provides assistance to vulnerable seniors and older adults struggling to make ends meet. Help us fight senior hunger and support critical programs that help individuals in need by [making a tax-deductible contribution](#).

### Step 2: IT'S A SNAP!

Another way to help hungry families buy the food they need is to encourage them to apply for SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program—formerly called food stamps). Consider handing out the flyer in this packet to promote SNAP. You could ask the food bank if they would like assistance in promoting this program. If so, you can hand out flyers during your food drive, and/or leave flyers in places of faith, senior centers, grocery stores, etc.



Each state's SNAP application process and form is different, so there is room at the bottom of the sample flyer for you to print the local agency or state agency's phone number. Visit [www.aarp.org/snapmap](http://www.aarp.org/snapmap) to look up the phone numbers. Find more information about how to help others with SNAP on [www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to).

## Step 3: DECIDE HOW YOU WANT TO COLLECT FOOD

- **Single-site drop off:** Ask people to bring food donations to one location during set hours on a specific day. Volunteers man the collection site.
- **Extended food drive:** Set up numerous collection points with drop boxes where people can leave food over the course of numerous weeks. Volunteers collect the donations once per day.
- **Event-related food drive:** Your team partners with a local event – like a sports game, music festival or county fair – and sets up collection sites at the event.

**Got a community garden?** Consider arranging donations from the garden to the recipient organization. Rules vary on accepting fresh food, so be sure to talk this over with the organization you have in mind. Interested in starting a community garden? Check out the how-to guide on [www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to)

✓ Food aid groups often lack fresh produce to provide to hungry people.

## Step 4: ASSESS VOLUNTEER NEEDS

Establish a small committee to plan and coordinate the food drive. Select an overall coordinator (that may be you) and team leaders for individual tasks. Depending on the size of your food drive, there could be 2 to 6 team leaders.

- Schedule a training session for the team leads. Provide the leads with background on the selected organizations, a list of key dates/times (timeline of preparation), responsibilities needed to carry out the food drive and contact information for you and the other team leads.



## The team leads should:

- Help recruit volunteers for the food drive
- Promote the food drive with flyers throughout the community
- Ensure local media are aware of the drive
- Set up the collection site
- Lead a shift during the event
- Help coordinate food sorting and delivery after the drive.

✓ Teams can help share the work, motivate volunteers/donors and hold each other accountable to deadlines. Many hands make light work!

## Step 5: FIND A DROP-OFF LOCATION

Identify the desired location for food drop-off and collection such as a school, local business, shopping center, faith-based organization or grocery store.

Contact the appropriate person (store manager, principal, etc.) to get permission to hold the drive there and ask if they'd like to participate in any way. When you call, make sure you have information on the food drive (the goal, the preferred date, background on the organization the food will support, etc).

Depending on the size of the drive and the number of volunteers, you might want to hold it at multiple locations. Keep in mind this requires more logistical organization and volunteers but will yield more food.

✓ A location that is centrally located, with built-in traffic, a large parking lot and an inside option (in case of bad weather) is ideal.

Once you nail down a location, work out logistics with your contact there:

- Specific location for the food drive (e.g. at the entrance of the store or a section of the parking lot)
- The date and hours of operation for the drive
- Inclement weather backup plan
- Where the food will be stored before pick up
- Place to accommodate the volunteers who will organize the food for pick up.



**NOTE:** If a retailer is interested, consider exploring additional ways they could support the effort. Examples might include:

- Printing your flyers (the retailer could receive an acknowledgement on the flyer)
- Matching the donations raised from the public for the food drive in some way (with a dollar amount or a product donation from the retailer to the food bank or organization)
- Encouraging customers to donate money at the cash register for the food organization.

## Step 6: RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

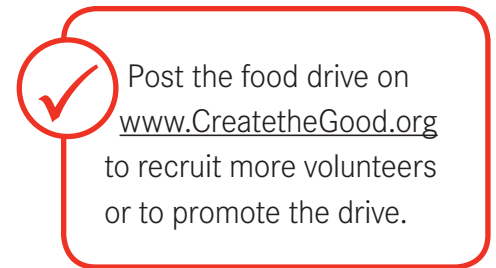
Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to help make the food drive a success. Check with the local community organizations, libraries, schools, senior citizen centers, places of worship, etc. that may already have a pool of volunteers for their own purposes. Email is a great way to keep the volunteers informed.

See the Tip Sheet in this guide for suggestions on how to manage volunteers.

## Step 7: GET THE WORD OUT

The key to a successful food drive is to get the word out about the event. Promote! Promote! Promote!

See the Tip Sheet in this guide for suggestions on how to publicize your event.



## Step 8: FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

Confirm all details with the recipient organization, your team leaders and your contact person at the drive location to clarify:

- Dropping off boxes/crates prior to the drive and picking up food following the drive
- Food sorting instructions (if any)
- Supplying tables, chairs and refreshments for the volunteers
- Staffing schedule for the day of the food drive (2 to 3-hour shifts are best)
- Creating and posting 3 or 4 large signs within a block or two of the food drive on event day.



- Be prepared with information for people that tell you they *need* food. Identify the closest food pantry, as well as the closest place people can go to get assistance in applying for SNAP, the food stamp program (see SNAP flyer in this kit)

### Step 9: EVENT DAY

Set up the food collection site (i.e. two tables with chairs behind it; refreshments behind the volunteer chairs, boxes/crates clearly labeled for various food types)



Volunteers (not contributors) should put the food in the appropriate crate to ensure efficiency.

- Post the Food Drive signs in visible areas and have flyers available
- Welcome volunteers as they arrive, and show them how things will work.
- Relax, smile and enjoy the wonderful event that is bringing together the community
- When the drive is over, clean up the area and take down the signs. Leave the area the same (if not cleaner) than when you arrived.
- Thank the hosting organization and the volunteers.

### Step 10: FOLLOW UP (within one week)

- Send a thank you note, call or email to all volunteers (using the method by which they prefer to be contacted). Include how much food was donated and whether there are plans for additional food drives or other volunteer opportunities.
- Call or write a thank you note to the hosting organization. Again, let them know how much food was donated and convey their important role in the success of the program and the difference they are making.
- While it is still fresh in your mind, develop a list of lessons learned for future events. Check in with the local food organization to see if they have suggestions to include.
- Keep in touch with volunteers and local communities for future volunteer opportunities.



# Step 11: INSPIRE OTHERS ON CREATETHEGOOD.ORG!

### **TELL US WHAT YOU DID!**

We want to hear stories about how you helped give back to your community at [www.CreateTheGood.org/stories](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/stories). You just might inspire others to do the same.

### **SHARE FEEDBACK**

We are always looking for feedback on our materials, so please let us know how this guide was helpful or additional information you wish we could have included. Share lessons learned and other tips for others who are organizing food drives at [www.aarp.org/CreateTheGoodgroup](http://www.aarp.org/CreateTheGoodgroup).

### **KEEP UP THE GOOD!**

Remember, whether you've got five minutes, five hours or five days, you can make a positive impact in your community. And if you have more time, consider organizing another service activity, finding local opportunities and posting your events at [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).






## Tip Sheet: Meeting an Organization's Needs

Once you have selected the local program you would like to support, get more information on their needs before you start implementing a comprehensive plan. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. You'll want to be armed with information for your volunteers! Here are some suggested areas to discuss:

- Who is the best contact person for the food drive?
- What are the best times of year and dates to receive food donations?
- What types of food are in short supply? What specific foods may be needed?
- Healthy, age-appropriate food (e.g. low-sodium or low-sugar foods, and/or easy-to-open packages)
- Culturally-appropriate products? (needs will vary by local population)
- Non-food items?
- Specific foods or packaging that they cannot accept?
- Acceptance of fresh food?
- Preference for quantities of each food type (e.g. large or small packages)
- How should the food be sorted at the collection site (e.g. canned food, boxed food, condiments, etc.)?
- Does the organization have boxes or crates for food sorting?
- How will the food be delivered to the organization (pick-up or delivery?)
- When is the best time for pickup and delivery?
- Can they provide information on the organization for volunteers, donors or media outlets?


 See suggested lists of age-appropriate and culturally-appropriate food in this how-to guide.



### Tips On Managing Volunteers

Develop a roster of all the volunteers. Be sure to get their full name and contact information so you can keep them informed during the planning stage.

Host a meeting three to five weeks prior to the food drive so the volunteers understand the goal of the food drive, what is required of them, the timeline of the drive and background on the selected organization you are supporting. Provide a take-away sheet with the information provided at the meeting.

 Peak hours will need more volunteers than the early and later hours of the event.

Develop a schedule for the volunteers so that you have sufficient support throughout the day. Communicate the schedule to all the volunteers two weeks prior to the food drive so there is time for rescheduling if needed. Suggested tasks for volunteers include:

- Make and distribute flyers/signs for event promotion
- Promote the event through personal contacts and local community organizations (see specifics in Generating Publicity Tip Sheet).
- Staff the event (including set up and take down)
- Transport food donations to the recipient organization
- Follow up communications, including the food drive results and thanking the supporters.

For more tips on project management, see the Nuts and Bolts Guide for Organizers at [www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to).



### Tips On Generating Publicity

#### **Make a flyer.**

Be creative, but also provide key information. You may want to look at other organizations' food drive flyers for ideas. Include these facts on the flyer:

Suggested foods for contribution (specific items requested by the organizations, non-perishable foods, gift cards)

- Date, time and location of the event
- Brief information on the organization that will receive the food
- Pertinent contact information for more information.

#### **Distribute the flyer.**

Consider the same sources used for recruiting volunteers (schools, faith based organizations, community centers) and public places including grocery stores, coffee shops, libraries, etc.

Word of mouth goes a long way.

- Spread the word to your friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers. Talk to them in person or use email or social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to get the word out. Ask them to spread the word as well.
- Approach everyone with a friendly, positive attitude. Explain that it will be a fun event focused on a great cause.
- Use message boards – both online and the old-fashioned way.

#### **Reach the Largest Audience**

Use your local newspapers, magazines, community guides, Web sites, radio stations, and television and cable access channels to help spread the word about your food drive to expand your audience. The local press often welcomes information about community events. And many radio and TV stations and news outlets offer online forms to simplify event promotion. Also try to get the details in school and faith based newsletter or bulletin announcements.

#### **How to Contact the Media**

- Ask some volunteers to develop a list of local editors and reporters (names, phone numbers and email addresses). Most newspapers and radio and television stations will list newsroom contact information on their websites. The reporters most interested in your announcement will be community editors.



- E-mail basic details of the event, using plain text without any fancy graphics.
- Put the event's date in the subject line. The e-mail should include:
  - Name of event (\_\_\_\_\_ Food Drive)
  - Complete date and time of the food drive
  - What organization is being supported, and how much food you are hoping to assemble for a specific cause
  - Any special guests or events
  - Your contact information (for further questions and possible volunteers)
- Send your announcements at least two weeks before the food drive day.
- Follow up with reporters several days after the event to announce the results of the drive, the approximate number of donors and volunteers and where the food will go. Send this information to the same media list.

### Publicizing the Food Drive – Before and After

- Use the attached sample Promotional Flyer as a guide to create your own flyer.
- Ask permission to display flyers, posters or postcards at coffee shops, libraries, malls and local businesses. Invite local businesses to participate with you.
- Ask local community members to promote the food drive through their local place of faith, clubs, community groups, etc. People are most likely to do this if they're motivated by the charity that will benefit from the donations.
- Invite a local celebrity – a congressional representative, your mayor or a radio show host – to highlight the need for food and promote the event.



The best time to send media announcements are Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

## SAMPLE FOOD LIST

### Healthy Foods for All Ages

(Please check with your local food collection agency to determine the most needed items in your community, including fresh fruits and vegetables)

- Non-perishable Food Items
- Canned Proteins (tuna, salmon, chicken, peanut butter) peanuts, etc.
- Canned Fruits in Own Juices or Light Syrup (pineapples, peaches, and pears)
- 100% Fruit Juices (all sizes including juice boxes)
- Grains (pasta, whole wheat pasta, rice, brown rice, macaroni and cheese) bags of beans: black, pink, kidney, etc.; corn flour or MASECA (for tortillas)
- Condiments (tomato based sauces, light soy sauce, ketchup, mustard, light salad dressings) Goya powder condiments; salt; sugar (brown)
- Low Sodium/ No Salt Added Canned Vegetables (mixed, green beans, corn) beans: black, pink, kidney, etc.
- Soups (beef stew, chili, chicken noodle, turkey rice)
- Multigrain Cereal (Cheerios, Corn Flakes, Grape-Nuts, Raisin Bran)



# Neighborhood Food Drive

NEIGHBORHOOD LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

Please participate in a neighborhood food drive on:

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEMS NEEDED:



For more information, contact:

Name:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

## It's Worth The Time...



*"It gives me money to go and buy meat..."*

*"...I had more money to buy food -  
and with the money  
I had leftover, I paid bills."*

*"I can buy things that I WANT to eat..."*

**...to get help paying for groceries.**

Go to [www.aarp.org/snap](http://www.aarp.org/snap) to  
learn how easy it is to apply  
for the new **S**upplemental  
**N**utritional **A**ssistance **P**rogram .

**It's a SNAP.**

**AARP and AARP Foundation believe that no one  
of any age should go hungry.**

Learn more about AARP's Hunger Campaign at

[www.aarp.org/hunger](http://www.aarp.org/hunger)



### More Resources

- **Feeding America:** A network of more than 200 food banks supporting approximately 61,000 local charitable agencies and 70,000 programs which provide food directly to individuals and families in need. [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)
- **USDA** The Food and Nutrition Information Center has a myriad of resources and ideas for how to address hunger issues in your community.
- **Share Our Strength:** Information on hunger as well as other tips for how to hold a successful food drive: [www.strength.org/get\\_involved/food\\_drive/](http://www.strength.org/get_involved/food_drive/)
- **Meals On Wheels Association of America:** Meals on Wheels represents some 5,000 local, community-based Senior Nutrition Programs, which provide well over one million meals to seniors who need them each day. Some programs serve meals at congregate locations like senior centers, some programs deliver meals directly. [www.mowaa.org](http://www.mowaa.org)
- **How-to Guides on Food Stamp (SNAP) outreach,** How to Feed A Hungry Family, Community Gardens and more [www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to)